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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000088

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SUBJECT: AG MINISTER PRUNSKIENE: MORE EU MEANS ROOM FOR
U.S.?

REF: A. VILNIUS 57

- [B](#). 2004 VILNIUS 1523
- [C](#). 2004 VILNIUS 1505
- [D](#). 2004 VILNIUS 1315
- [E](#). 2004 VILNIUS 739

Classified By: Pol/Econ Officer Christian Yarnell
for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Agricultural Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene, meeting with Ambassador Mull on January 25, painted a picture of an EU branded agricultural policy for Lithuania and pledged to focus her efforts on rural development. She praised U.S.-Lithuanian cooperation on agricultural and rural development issues, and highlighted these areas and development of agro-tourism as investment targets. In her capacity as MP and former head of a nuclear energy task force, Prunskiene advocated a continuation of Lithuania's nuclear power capability, assuring that the GOL would not exclude American companies from negotiations with investors, now set to begin in earnest. The former leader of the Women's Party also pledged to help our efforts to open a local shelter for victims of trafficking-in-persons. While Prunskiene will be a strong proponent of EU policies in her Ministerial position, we anticipate healthy collaboration with her on some matters of mutual interest. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Ambassador Mull met with Kazimiera Prunskiene, Peasant Party leader and recently-confirmed Minister of Agriculture, January 25 as part of his tour of Lithuania's new Cabinet (ref A). Prunskiene spoke of her attempts to energize the Agricultural Ministry. The Ambassador also engaged her, as an important player in the Government coalition, on other items of particular interest outside the scope of her Ministry. Prunskiene, who has often called for Lithuania to adopt "more European" policies (ref E), spoke highly of cooperation with the United States, but outlined a Lithuanian agricultural policy lockstep with the EU vision.

A European Agricultural Policy

[1](#)3. (U) Prunskiene presented her strategic plan for the Ministry, which she said would focus on developing a modern, competitive, and secure agricultural sector in Lithuania. She highlighted development of rural tourism, biofuels production, and traditional crops as important agricultural initiatives. Ambassador Mull noted that agricultural policy will remain an important element of U.S. foreign policy and described biotech as a unique opportunity for agricultural development and a global imperative. Prunskiene responded hesitantly, emphasizing the importance of food security, and echoing the European "precautionary principle" on introducing GMOs into the environment and the food chain.

Focus on Rural Development

[1](#)4. (U) Prunskiene spotlighted rural development as a critical element of the Ministry's activities. Developing capacity to absorb effectively EU agricultural support, she said, would be a ministry priority. Prunskiene said she hoped to increase investment into Lithuania's rural areas dramatically, noting that the Ministry might attempt to move its division for rural development from the capital to a location closer to agricultural lands, in an attempt to raise the issue's profile. The Ambassador said that he had witnessed first-hand the country's large disparity between urban and rural development and praised Prunskiene's attention to the problem.

Cooperation with United States

[1](#)5. (U) Ambassador Mull expressed his desire to advance U.S.-Lithuanian cooperation on agricultural issues, noting that our dialogue will significantly expand as a result of

Lithuania's EU membership. He said that U.S. business would welcome solid agricultural investment opportunities. Prunskiene thanked the Ambassador for past collaboration, highlighting ongoing contact with Ohio's agrarian community as especially useful. The Ambassador cited the Cochran Fellowship Program's history of valuable informational exchanges and exposure to U.S. practices and research, and he encouraged the Ministry to help identify the candidates to visit the United States. The Ambassador also encouraged Prunskiene to travel to the United States, promising to help work-up an extensive program for her.

Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant

16. (SBU) The Ambassador queried Prunskiene, the driving force behind Lithuanian efforts to retain its nuclear energy capacity, about the future of the Ignalina plant. Following EU mandates, Ignalina's first reactor went offline in December 2004, and decommissioning of the final reactor should follow in 2009 (refs C and D). Prunskiene argued that Lithuania, already possessing the necessary nuclear infrastructure and technical expertise, should not give it up. Noting that the GOL has already established as its a goal the continuation of nuclear power generation capabilities, Prunskiene said that the process has moved into the "second phase," namely negotiations with possible investors. Ambassador Mull noted that American companies would likely be interested in a project to build a new reactor, and Prunskiene assured him that the GOL would consider working with "a company from outside the EU."

Trafficking-in-Persons Shelter

17. (SBU) Ambassador Mull briefed Prunskiene on a situation involving a shelter and rehabilitation center for victims of trafficking-in-persons in the town of Sirvintos. EUCOM has awarded a substantial contract to a local NGO to open the shelter, already approved by the GOL, but the local municipality has refused to grant the necessary building permit for the project. Prunskiene, a longtime champion of women's rights, promised to raise the issue with the Sirvintos mayor, the local leader of her Peasant Party, and with the Peasant Party-dominated city council. She praised the Ambassador for his work on TIP issues, and expressed hope that they would be able to work out the situation in Sirvintos.

Comment: A Europeanist, But Willing to Work with the USG

18. (C) We have long recognized Prunskiene's penchant for "Europeanism" (meaning less U.S. influence), and expect that her policies as Minister of Agriculture will undoubtedly mirror those of the European Union. That said, Prunskiene continues to appreciate cooperative efforts with the United States, and has now gone on the record in saying that the contract to build a new Lithuanian nuclear facility remains open to U.S. companies. Prunskiene also appeared sincere in her pledge to help us in our local anti-TIP activities. While there is no hope in enlisting Prunskiene as an ally in any U.S.-EU agricultural disputes, we see her as a powerful and popular (if not entirely populist) political force with whom we believe we can work on some matters of mutual interest.
MULL